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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510 - 3505

January 09, 2020

The Honorable Carl C. Risch
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Consular Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Risch:

I write to you today to raise concerns regarding the safety of Americans as they travel abroad and the steps that the Department takes to inform travelers of security concerns when they are far from home. It has come to my attention that some employees in foreign airports have resorted to a "bullet-in-luggage" scheme, which has led to the arrest and detention of travelers in both the Philippines and Thailand. The actions by these employees have had a lasting physical, mental, and monetary impact on travelers, and if the Department is aware of such schemes, it should make the information public and inform Americans of the dangers prior to travel.

Starting in 2015, media reports indicated that employees at the Manila airport in the Philippines would place a single bullet in a traveler's luggage, which would then lead to detention after screening at security, charges, and subsequently legal fees. Since 2017, additional media sources noted the same scam at Subvarnabhumi airport in Thailand. When Americans travel abroad, it is incumbent upon them to take security considerations into account, however, if there are local employees involved in an illegal scheme to detain and extort travelers, the Department should take action to alert travelers and notify the countries of these scams. Airport security is of the utmost importance, however, our government should push reform efforts so that no other traveler has to go through such a terrible ordeal. I request a briefing regarding what the Department knows about this scheme or others like it, and what steps it has taken to inform American travelers of these concerns.

I appreciate the work that your office has done on behalf of Americans abroad, and I look forward to a quick response.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator